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Home / News / Medical Laboratory Technology students graduating early at UMA, UMPI

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Medical Laboratory Technology students graduating early at UMA, UMPI



Because of the COVID-19 healthcare emergency, students in the Medical Laboratory Technology (MLT) Program at the University of Maine at Augusta and the University of Maine at Presque Isle are graduating early and are eligible to begin work this week.

“Even as they work behind the scenes, our graduates know they are a vital part of the healthcare system,” said Judith Clukey, UMA Co-Director of the MLT Program and Education Coordinator at MaineGeneral Medical Center. “Laboratory testing is involved in 70 to 80% of all diagnoses. We are pleased that all six UMA graduates of the MLT Program have found employment and will begin their careers at this critical time of need.”



According to Leigh Belair, UMPI Assistant Professor and Co-Director of the MLT Program of Maine, students in the MLT program traditionally do their clinical training in the spring at clinical affiliate sites including hospitals, clinics, and laboratories. Due to the physical layout of the state, there are affiliates that UMPI traditionally partners with and those that partner with UMA for student training. However, due to the challenges of COVID-19, hospital administrative policy changes around student internships were implemented and resulted in some student displacements from their training sites.

“We are pleased that all six UMA graduates of the MLT Program have found employment and will begin their careers at this critical time of need.”

—Judith Clukey, UMA Co-Director of the MLT Program

This resulted in several UMA affiliates stepping in to provide training placements for UMPI students. Co-Directors Clukey and Belair worked together to address the unexpected policy changes and found placements for all students.

“Our clinical affiliates recognize the role that the MLT Program of Maine plays in the workforce as we provide them with lab professionals that are desperately needed in Maine,” Clukey said. “The lab community in Maine is small and our affiliates went above and beyond to provide training opportunities during the pandemic for our MLT students.”

Following Spring Break and due to the impacts of COVID-19, modifications to the remaining MLT training schedule were also necessary: “The practicum schedule was abbreviated, but it still provided our students with an introduction to the remaining departments in their practicums. These changes required a lot of coordination, but it allowed us to balance the health and safety of our students with the academic requirements of the program while meeting the clinical needs of our affiliates,” Belair said.

The students have met the degree requirements for MLT and are now able to begin their careers in clinical laboratories two weeks sooner than originally planned. The students were originally scheduled to finish up on May 15 and be eligible to start work on May 18; instead, they took their last test on May 1 and became eligible to work on May 4.

The MLT Program of Maine is a collaborative program sponsored by UMPI and UMA in cooperation with hospitals across the state that serve as clinical affiliates. The Associate’s degree program prepares students for careers as medical laboratory technicians in settings that include hospitals, clinics, and forensic laboratories. MLT Program of Maine graduates are often hired before they finish their clinical training and the program has an average 3-year graduate placement rate of 97%.

There are 15 students graduating from the MLT program, 9 from UMPI and 6 from UMA, and the majority of them were already committed to work at sites in Maine starting on May 4.

“The laboratory has faced a shortfall of techs for quite some time. Now, with the challenges of COVID-19, there has never been a more important time to get our students working” Belair said. “The laboratory and lab testing are discussed daily in the news, and it makes me proud that our graduates will play a critical role in this effort. With our profession in the spotlight, the students have an opportunity to contribute both now and in the future.”

For more information about UMPI’s MLT Program, contact Belair at (207) 768-9440 or email leigh.belair@maine.edu. For more information about UMA’s MLT Program, contact Clukey at (207) 626-6773 or email judith.clukey@maine.edu.

COVID-19, MEDICAL LABORATORY TECHNOLOGY

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